

Robert R. Weyeneth

Preservation Fieldwork at the University of South Carolina

One field site in the Charleston Preservation Field School is this plantation on James Island, South Carolina, which has a rare extant street of slave cabins. Photo by the author.

Historic preservation education at the University of South Carolina is housed within the Applied History Program, established in the 1970s and now one of the oldest and largest public history programs in the United States. Our curriculum combines an interdisciplinary course of study in preservation with a disciplinary foundation in history. Recently, the emphasis of faculty and student research has come to focus on the preservation of African-American heritage and the challenges of preserving the recent, and sometimes controversial, past.

Preservation students at South Carolina earn a Masters of Arts degree in Applied History. As a preservation program based in a department of history, rather than in urban planning or architecture, we train students to be historians equipped with the skills to apply that knowledge in the public and private sectors. Our graduates find professional positions with the National Park Service and other federal cultural resource agencies, state historic preservation offices, consulting firms, state parks and museums, city preservation offices, Main Street programs, and statewide and local non-profit organizations all across the country.



One strength of our program is the innovative approach to summer field work. In alternating summers, we offer two field courses, one based in England that presents an international perspective on applied history and another based in Charleston that examines current issues in American preservation practice.

The Kiplin Hall summer program offers a comparative, international perspective on public history through a five-week course in England. It is designed to introduce students to heritage conservation through classes with English professionals and field visits to museums and historic sites in North Yorkshire and London. Students also complete hands-on work at Kiplin Hall itself, a 375-year-old country estate in North Yorkshire that serves as both a home base and a subject for research. In past years, South Carolina students have undertaken preservation and museum projects that have documented historic landscape features, researched the land transfers by which the estate was reduced from 5,000 to 120 acres, designed and built an exhibit for visitors, and produced a videotape orientation to the site. The Kiplin Hall field course is taught in even-numbered years and is limited to graduate students enrolled in the Applied History Program. We find that a number of prospective students seek admission to our program

Kiplin Hall, North Yorkshire, is a 375-year-old English country estate that serves as the home of the summer field course offered in even-numbered years. Photo by the author.



because of the opportunity to participate in the Kiplin Hall course.

The Charleston Preservation Field School offers an intensive introduction to preservation issues through a two-week course based in the historic city of Charleston, South Carolina. Charleston's architectural legacy and its nearby plantation landscapes provide a unique laboratory for exploring subjects as varied as preservation of African-American material culture, linkages between historic preservation and environmental concerns, and preservation without gentrification. Field school participants meet with practicing professionals and visit historic sites to discuss such topics as the role of government and non-profit agencies in the preservation process, issues in planning and community development, historic site interpretation, and the economics of private sector

The St. Phillip School (1938) typifies the schoolhouses erected in rural South Carolina for African-American students prior to desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s. Photo by David G. Blick.



preservation. The field school is taught in odd-numbered years, and enrollment is open to graduate and appropriate upper-division undergraduate students at the University of South Carolina and elsewhere, working professionals, and interested lay people.

While our summer courses and the required internship provide students with considerable real world exposure, increasingly we have been able to offer hands-on training through contract research projects secured by the Applied History Program. A three-year contract to inventory Cold War historical resources in South Carolina, funded by the federal government at almost \$500,000, provided students with experience implementing a massive cultural resource survey on a statewide scale as well as the opportunity to work on preservation issues associated with recent utilitarian architecture. An on-going, state-funded contract involves documentation and research on the architectural history of

South Carolina's Statehouse as part of a restoration and seismic retrofitting project.

Preservation education at the University of South Carolina seeks to take full advantage of the opportunities for researching, preserving, and interpreting African-American heritage in the state. The region has an enormous depth and diversity of documentary and material resources for African-American preservation projects, because for most of its history South Carolina had a majority black population. In recent years Applied History students have participated in statewide initiatives to promote African-American heritage tourism, developed walking tours of African-American historic sites, and researched the often-neglected story of integration in the United States at the local level. In addition, they have nominated to the National Register of Historic Places a number of sites impor-

tant in African-American history, including churches and cemeteries, rural schoolhouses, black business districts, the homes of civil rights activists, and locations of civil rights confrontations. Three recent projects undertaken by Applied History students illustrate some of the possibilities for African-American heritage preservation in South Carolina.

David Blick investigated rural African-American schoolhouses built in South Carolina during the period of racial segregation. Conditions in schools like these had convinced the United States Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*

(1954), to rule that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Through a combination of archival and field work, Blick was able to determine the locations of extant schools and then researched their history and architecture. Several of the schoolhouses were subsequently nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and Blick published a booklet on the project with the assistance of the Historic Columbia Foundation, a local non-profit preservation organization. The Foundation is currently working with a neighborhood association to restore one schoolhouse. Another school has become the subject of an educational and interpretive program for elementary school students.

Steven Davis examined the historic black business district of South Carolina's capital city. Commercial districts like this were typical of the urban South during the Jim Crow era; ironically, most declined when public accommodations were

Integration led to the decline of the African-American commercial districts characteristic of the urban South during the Jim Crow era. The North Carolina Mutual Building (1909) is the most significant extant structure associated with the historic black business district of Columbia, South Carolina. Photo by Steven A. Davis.



integrated in the 1960s. Davis researched the size and history of Columbia's black downtown and identified the North Carolina Mutual Building as the most significant remnant today. This building housed life insurance companies, a Masonic lodge, and professional offices, including the law offices of two attorneys active in civil rights litigation. Davis got the building listed as a local landmark and placed on the National Register, and the public library was persuaded not to demolish the structure for a parking lot. Since then an architectural consultant has prepared a conditions assessment, and the owner is exploring rehabilitation through local and federal preservation tax incentives.

Jill Hanson studied the house where South Carolina civil rights activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins lived for 60 years. Civil rights activity was most frequently a local undertaking in the United States, and the homes of local activists—most of whom were women—functioned as offices and meeting places, provided guest accommodations for visiting national leaders, and sometimes became targets for racist violence. Hanson researched the life of the late activist and the history of her Columbia residence and prepared the nomination of the home for listing on the National Register. The Collaborative for Community Trust, a local social justice organization, is currently raising funds to purchase the house from the family, stabilize the structure, and convert it for use as its offices and as a community gathering place.

In its own way, each of these projects demonstrates the value of a history-based preservation curriculum and the opportunities that preservation has for shaping both public memory and the understanding of race relations in modern American life.

Robert R. Weyeneth is Co-Director of the Applied History Program and a faculty member in the Department of History, University of South Carolina. He has written on historic landscapes in Hawaii, community studies and labor history in Washington State, and the material legacy of the modern civil rights movement.

More information on the Applied History Program at the University of South Carolina can be found on its web site: <http://www.cla.sc.edu/hist/apphist.htm>.

For more information about the Charleston Preservation Field School, visit its web site at <http://www.cla.sc.edu/hist/charlstn.html>.

The home where civil rights activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins lived for 60 years in Columbia, South Carolina is on the National Register of Historic Places, and a local social justice organization is seeking to purchase and restore it. Photo by the author.

